

Foster Parents

Changing Lives One Child at a Time

May 2005



*"To the world you might be one person,
but to one person you might be the world."*

– Unknown

Check out the Foster Parent website:

www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents

The Foster Parent LISTSERV® is growing!

Join the 60 people who have joined. Sign up today.

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1>

For you who are the world to a foster child or children in your care, we say thank you. Every year, thousands of children in this state find their world a better place because of the commitment you make to them. We continue to be grateful for all that you do.

Foster Parent Caregiver Support Line 1-800-301-1868

Help is on the way. Beginning June 1, Children's Administration will offer a toll-free support line after regular business hours for foster parents and other caregivers providing care to children in state care. It will operate from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. week days and all day on weekends and holidays. Those answering your call will help you troubleshoot issues you may be having with the children in your care.

The number is 800-301-1868. Remember, this service does not begin until June 1.

The line is intended to help you through crises you may be having with kids, such as medical, emotional or emergency situations. Please note this line is not intended to solve routine problems such as payment and respite issues; those will require consultation with the child's social worker during daytime hours.

Those answering the calls will be trained to talk you through problems and equipped with a list of other local resources to help you.

May is Foster Care Month

Gov. Christine Gregoire has proclaimed May Foster Care Month in Washington. You can read her proclamation on the foster parent web site (address above).

The governor also will participate in an event at the Capitol May 17 recognizing the contributions of foster parents across the state. You are invited to attend. For more information contact Bob Partlow, 360-902-8063 or pbob300@dshs.wa.gov Gov. Gregoire is expected to wear a blue ribbon, part of the national campaign spearheaded by Casey Family Programs to draw attention to the contributions of parents and the need for more foster parents in every neighborhood.

- Watch the web site or join the LISTSERV® (address above) to learn more about the event at the Capitol and to learn what events are occurring in your community.

Building Relationships and Working Together

Children do better when all the significant important adults in their life work together for the child's best interest. When children come into foster care, they can find their loyalties torn between the adults who are currently taking care of them 24/7 and parents, siblings and extended family members with whom they have developed relationships and bonded in their young lives – as difficult as their lives might have been.

When children are placed in state care, strain can exist between biological parents who are upset at their children being removed and social workers and foster parents who are trying to focus their attention on

providing care and services to children whose lives have been disrupted. Foster parents are in a position to be “transitional bridges” in a child’s life. At this crucial time, they can help provide a positive environment to continue the significant relationships children bring with them when they come into care.

Following this idea of “bridge building,” Children’s Administration staff is working on activities to improve the working relationship between biological and foster parents:

- Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) is a practice now being used as part of Children’s Administration’s Kids Come First - II reform initiative. An FTDM meeting is held when children are removed from their biological homes, or when there is going to be a change in where they will be living. Meetings are held within 72 hours of removal with the biological parents, other relatives, other important adults, social workers, supervisors. If a child is leaving a home or move is imminent, a meeting will be scheduled as soon as possible. Foster parents will be invited to participate in the meeting in these situations.

As a child welfare practice, such meetings assure the parent and foster parents have a voice at the table at the earlier possible point when decisions will be made. Such meetings allow family and foster parents to be involved early and more often in building and planning for the child and family. Meetings like this are now being held in Tacoma, Kent in the Office of African American Children Services in King County, Yakima, Richland, Spokane and Vancouver

- Placement Agreements will introduced as a promising new child welfare practice over the next six months when a child comes into a new foster home. The agreements will help foster parents and biological parents and the children in care by providing a clearer definition of roles and more formal structure to the less formal arrangements made now about logistics regarding the child. Foster parents and state staff, as team members working together for the best interests of the child, will sign the agreements. A section of the agreement refers to the foster parent as “bridge builders” with biological parents. However, if a social worker or foster parents feels this is not appropriate or safe, this section will be re-negotiated by the social worker and foster parent. This is a major piece of work aimed at getting the important adults working together to help ensure a child has a safe and healthy family and future.
- Look for information on upcoming training on working with biological families at the foster parent web site.

Hopeful Results: Foster Parents Helping Biological Parents

- Mentoring of biological parents by foster parents has been successfully done in programs started in Vancouver and Olympia the past two years. With careful matching of foster parents and biological parents, great success has been achieved in giving biological parents support and the skills they need to better care for children. Foster parents are recruited for biological parent mentoring, but not for the parents of those children in their care. Those who do receive a small monthly stipend.

Foster Care Alumni

Check out the Casey Family Programs web site below to read the study done of more than 600 former foster children in Oregon and Washington. Among the major findings: as adults, 25 percent of those surveyed suffered from post traumatic stress disorder; most had a high school diploma - about 28 percent achieved it through a GED.; about 81 percent reported being loved in care while 1/3 reported some maltreatment. 63 percent reported receiving some or a lot of help from foster parents while in care. One third had current income below the poverty level and one third had no insurance; 80 percent were employed. For more information, the web site is: <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/NorthwestAlumniStudy.htm>

Foster Parent and Caregivers Conference

Just a reminder: Mark your calendar for September 25-27 for the Foster Parent and Caregivers Conference at Ocean Shores. We will have more details next month.